

Statement by Congressman Christopher H. Smith  
Markup of H.Res.608 Condemning the Escalating Levels of Religious  
Persecution in the People's Republic of China  
April 6, 2006

This afternoon I am pleased to bring up for consideration the bill of my good friend and colleague, Representative McCotter. House Resolution 608 addresses and condemns the escalating levels of religious persecution in the People's Republic of China.

China's repression of religion is arguably among the most despotic in the world. Despite China's entrance into the world economy, its government refuses to grant its citizens universally recognized rights to freedom of religion and thought. The People's Republic of China permits religious practice only for government-sanctioned organizations and registered locations of worship. Those who practice other faiths as their consciences demand risk disappearing into one of hundreds of Laogai, the forced education through labor system established by Mao Tse-tung decades ago.

Not only is religious persecution of numerous groups and movements ongoing, but it is actually growing. The Voice of the Martyrs reports that just a few weeks ago, the Chinese Public Security Bureau raided a registered

Protestant church in Henan Province because its meetings were considered a part of an “illegal evil cult.” In February, the BBC reported that China warned Hong Kong's newly-appointed Cardinal, Joseph Zen, a well-known critic of China's suppression of religious freedoms, to remain quiet on political issues. Last summer, this Subcommittee heard testimony from Mr. Chen Yonglin, formerly a diplomat for the Chinese government, who said “According to my knowledge, the persecution on the Falun Gong by the Chinese Communist Party is a systematic campaign.” For instance, Falun Gong practitioners such as Ms. Yuju Yuan and her son Mr. Jinhui Liang sit in prison today for no “crime” other than their peaceful participation in Falun Gong activities.

According to the State Department’s 2005 International Religious Freedom Report, the Chinese Government’s “respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements.” Members of unregistered groups, including Protestants and Catholics, are subject to restrictions including intimidation, harassment, detention, arrest and imprisonment.

Given these disturbing facts, Congressman McCotter's resolution condemning the government of China's systematic persecution of religious and spiritual groups is both appropriate and timely.

Keeping up with the names of those persecuted for their faith in China is a task that must be constantly monitored and the list updated. I worked with Congressman McCotter on an amendment to this resolution adding the names of some Protestant House Church leaders whose cases warrant inclusion in this resolution, such as Pastor Gong Shengliang who is the founder and pastor of The South China Church. He was arrested along with 16 other SCC leaders in April 2001 and is serving a life sentence for using a "heretical organization" (his registered church) to undermine the implementation of the law. Pastor Gong reportedly has been beaten severely while in prison and is now under 24/7 "observation" by two guards.

In conclusion, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution and the people of China who seek nothing more than to practice their faith freely.